DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 274 011 CS 505 372

AUTHOR Crawford, Lyall
TITLE Fighting to Get Closer: An Observational Study of Conflict in a Commune.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 49p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (77th, Atlantic City, NJ, April 30-May 3, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aggression; Behavior Patterns; *Collective Settlements; *Communication Research; Conflict; Cultural Influences; Group Experience; Intercultural Communication; *Interpersonal Communication; Philosophy; Religion; *Taoism
IDENTIFIERS *Communicator Style

ABSTRACT

The result of 6 months' observation of an American Taoist commune, this paper examines and interprets two episodes of confrontation, involving the persistently antagonistic Chinese director of the commune and one or more members, as a way of making sense of commune culture. The paper first examines the assumptions and values with which the researcher entered the commune, and why this was an important study of intercultural communication. It then discusses the researcher's methods of observation and how his participant/observer status affected his observations. Next, the paper explains briefly the analysis of the resulting field notes to identify behavioral patterns and interpretive themes. Descriptions are then given of the director's background, the commune and its financial status, and of the most prominent commune members. Two episodes of confrontation, representative of the more than 68 observed, are then described--one involving the director and a visitor, the other involving the director, his female "second in command," and a second woman who intervened in defense of the first woman. The paper then uses the framework of organizational culture to illustrate an extrinsic (explanations/interpretations deriving from existing theory) approach for interpreting the director's aggressive communication style. This section also explores the "performance" aspect of the director's behavior. Next, the paper examines the intrinsic (explanations/interpretations emerging from the social setting) factors for interpreting the confrontations, and seven explicit reasons the director used to support his encouragement of negative expression, aggression, and confrontation among the membership. In a section of concluding remarks, the paper notes that the commune was simply part of a larger social scene, although more intense. It also notes that while the high incidence of confrontation was surprising and at odds with the quietist principles of Tao, there was no "holier than thou" atmosphere, and the "fighting to get closer" philosophy appeared to succeed. (HTH)

ED274011

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lyall Crawford

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FIGHTING TO GET CLOSER:

AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF CONFLICT

IN A COMMUNE

Eastern Communication Association Convention
Atlantic City, New Jersey
30 April - 3 May 1986

Lyall Crawford, Ph.D.
Department of Communication Arts
Eastern Montana College
Billings, Montana 59101
(406) 657-2178

CS 505 372

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FIGHTING TO GET CLOSER: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF CONFLICT IN A COMMUNE[1]

ABSTRACT

Standard participant observation and interviewing techniques were used to study the communicating in an American Taoist commune. The prevalence of confrontation in the social lives of commune members was an unexpected discovery. This essay examines some of the conflict that occurred. Two episodes of confrontation are narrated and interpreted as a way of making sense of commune culture. Pertinent literature and indigenous evidence are used for structuring an understanding of the interpersonal explosiveness enacted in the commune.

Several years ago I lived as a resident researcher in a Taoist commune in Colorado. At first, my interests were global. I wanted to get a general sense of the place. Later, a number of behavioral/communicative themes became apparent to me during the course of my residency and I elected to study some of them more closely. Interpersonal confrontation was the most prominent and unexpected of the themes I decided to explore. Observation confirmed that conflict significantly characterized the social life of commune members.

The purpose of this essay is to narrate two episodes of confrontation and to provide different interpretations of the conflict depicted by these episodes as a way of making sense of commune culture. Before this can be done, however, some background is necessary.

Background

Assumptions and Values

It was clear to me from the beginning of this particular research project that the study I wanted to do would be ahypothetical. I was not interested in testing particular and predetermined propositions. Instead, I wanted to write a narrative about commune life/culture as I experienced it.

A study without formally stated hypotheses lends itself especially well to the so-called naturalistic research techniques. Participant observation, interviewing and document analysis (Bogdan, 1972; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Bruyn, 1966; Filstead, 1970; Jacobs, 1970; Lofland, 1971; McCall & Simmons, 1969; Pearce, 1977; Philipsen, 1977) were the devices I used to describe and interpret the manner of living I observed and experienced in this particular social context.

A basic tenet of philosophical Taoism as I understand it is to leave Nature be; to interfere as little as possible with the natural course of events. An ahypothetical design and the use of qualitative research methods seemed especially compatible with the philosophy itself and thus an ideal way to investigate the communicating/behavior in an American Taoist commune.

I also decided early on to conduct this study openly. I made my investigative intentions known at the start. My initial correspondence asked permission to become a resident and stated that I would be coming to the commune to study the communicating that occurred. After gaining proper entry and moving in with the commune members as a resident researcher, I again made certain that my research agenda was clearly understood by everyone.

In addition, I was determined to respect the integrity of the individuals I was studying. Humane considerations always had priority over investigative issues. (Roszak, 1969). As far as I am concerned, this is the only responsible way to conduct human study.

Finally, I needed to come to terms with myself as the instrument of inquiry (Jacobs, 1970). It has become trite to comment on the selectivity of perception and the idiosyncracy of interpretation. Still, each of us as investigators of social/communication phenomena must scrutinize ourselves for the manner in which we view our world and articulate what we discover so that others may assess our assertions. Mine is essentially an holistic view. The words organic and interdependent are meaningful for me. Fritjof Capra (1982) expresses this perspective in the following passage:

> We live today in a globally interconnected world, in which biological, psychological, social, and environmental phenomena are all interdependent. To describe this world appropriately we need an ecological perspective which the Cartesian world view does not offer. (p. 16)

Consequently, during the whole time I am investigating and writing about this commune I constantly ask myself how I fit into the stream of events I observe, describe, and interpret. Without being overly introspective and without identifying excessively with the persons I seek to understand, I attempt to be Geertz's (1973) "sensitive observer." And in the end I must recognize that although I am ostensibly making commentary about others, I am also, perhaps even more so, revealing myself.

Relevance of Study

Although the importance of intercultural communication research appears widely accepted in our discipline (the International and Intercultural Communication Annuals published by Sage now number nine volumes), there are, according to Ralph E. Cooley (Gudykunst, 1983, pp. 241-251), lines of inquiry and styles of investigation that have been neglected. Cooley urges those of us who claim intercultural communication as an area of interest to give more attention to the study of communication codes and to concentrate our efforts more on descriptive studies than on hypothetico-deductive approaches. In my opinion, Cooley's position is persuasive. Therefore, the research presented here is intended to be responsive to the case Cooley makes concerning the need for descriptive studies; the design, execution, and written account of this research all favor the descriptive style of inquiry.

A "descriptive study" is exactly what the phrase implies; so far as I know, there is no special meaning intended when the word "description," or any of its forms, is used to lable a distinguishing feature of what is commonly called qualitative communication research. My interests focus on human/intercultural communication as it takes place in naturally occurring situations. I am concerned with how people constitute themselves in and through their communicating as individuals and, especially, as social beings. (Here I am influenced by the work of John Stewart and Gerry Philipsen (1984) at the University of Washington having to do with communication as situated accomplishment.) Consequently, I first try to observe and describe what happens when interactants encounter one another. The description is essential and the narrative based on this observing and describing process, including implicit and explicit interpretation, may legitimately be thought of as a kind of journalism with references. The idea is to do what Cooley (Gudykunst, 1983) believes needs to be done; namely to undertake efforts to provide descriptive materials of human/intercultural communication processes. Cooley writes:

> We lack a general descriptive base from which to formulate theory and hypotheses, to make reasoned decisions concerning relevant choices of variables, and to supply a context within which our current theories can be examined to see if they are valid and relevant.... Currently we have only our intuitions as code users and scholars, and bits and pieces of our colleagues research, to supply us with this base. (Gudykunst, 1983, p. 242)

There is, then, a case for the need and importance of a "general descriptive base" for intercultural communication study.

Cooley's second assertion "that the study of codes should be one of the central concerns to the study of communication" is another issue that the present inquiry attempts to address. According to Cooley, "A code is a culturally defined, rule-governed system of shared arbitrary symbols that is used to transmit meaning" (Gudykunst, 1983, p. 242). Elsewhere in the Gudykunst volume it is observed that codes are also used to "elicit meaning." Included within Cooley's concept of code are

> both oral and written language: those paralanguage phenomena (such as pitch, stress, and loudness) systematically related to oral language, certain nonverbal phenomena characterized by their systematically (gesture, facial expression, and parts of gaze and posture); and, finally, the composition of discourse: silence, interruptions, turn-taking, choice of dialect or language, bilingual/bidialectal behaviors, and the like. (Gudykunst, 1983, p. 242)

This, as Cooley notes, "very broad definition" or description of code, including the amendment mentioned above, is another important feature of the research narrated here. The two episodes of confrontation depicted in this essay represent a category of behaviors that possessed significant communicative currency in the commune. The regular encouragement and occurrence of confrontation made these interactions extremely visible within the social structure of the group. Interpersonal conflict, as I observed it enacted in this social setting, exhibited the characteristics Cooley (Gudykunst, 1983) ascribes to code --shared, arbitrary, culturally determined, rule-governed, meaning ladened. Confrontation was a singular category of behaviors that gained prominence within a wide array of interactive possibilities. It became a convention

of communication; a specific kind of interaction that achieved a consensual recognition within the membership of this particular subculture. Conflict, as we shall see, had message value.

In short, Description and Code are promising but neglected tools for the investigation and understanding of human/intercultural communication phenomena. This essay uses both to explore and interpret a unique facet of American culture.

Method

Method is, of course, an important consideration. The choice of research procedures is deeply embedded in all the contingencies of what, within the various approaches to inquiry, is normally entailed by the investigation into the nature of human communication phenomena. The selection and implementation of research technique is especially crucial for one, such as myself, who is genuinely skeptical about the extent of human and cultural/intercultural understanding we can achieve on the basis of formal study. In light of this skepticism, and as I have already observed, unobtrusive methods of inquiry employed in naturally occurring settings are the least offensive with regard to establishing promising lines of investigation.

Again, the study reported here was done openly. It is based on my experiences as a resident researcher in an American Taoist commune. I lived in this particular speech community for six months and undertook my research with the expressed purpose of documenting an unusual American subculture. The present essay is a partial account of this research. It focuses on Tao-jen (pseudonym), leader and co-founder of the commune (which we shall give the fictitious name Settled Heart), and offers descriptions and interpretations of his confrontational communicating.

Because I have discussed the more formal and traditional methods of this inquiry in sufficient detail previously (i.e., selection of site, gaining entry and cooperation, initial ideas about what to look for, time in the field, decisions about what to focus on and whom to interview, Communication Quarterly, in press), I will concentrate here on the subjective dimensions of observational study technique by mentioning some of my private feelings (Lofland, 1971) as a resident researcher in this specific social context.

> How did you privately feel about this setting and its participants at various periods during the research? Were you highly sympathetic or not? Did you experience a possible "seduction effect"? (Lofland, 1971, p. 131)

Participant observation is personalized inquiry. The commune was a setting where group encounter and confrontation were established forms of social interaction, where a therapeutic norm prevailed and people were serious about "working on themselves." It was thus expected that there would be episodes of this kind of involvement for me as a resident researcher. The inner states and private feelings I experienced while living on the compound are a legitimate and necessary part of this account.

The moments when I was fully comfortable as a resident of Settled Heart were limited almost exclusively to times of solitude, including those instances when I was totally absorbed in a task at hand and oblivious to those around me.

> Bright sunlight on the snow.
> Lighting incense in my room.
> Putting crumbs out for the birds.
> Preparing soup -- what pleasure!

This is not to say that there were no pleasant encounters, or that I did not consider many of the other commune residents as friends, or that I was unable to empathize with them and Tao-jen. The personal significance of these relationships became more and more evident to me as departure time neared, and the interviewing process emphasized and allowed me to realize how involved I felt with Settled Heart. For instance, during t'ai chi, only a few days before completing the fieldwork, I became a little overwhelmed and wet-eyed as we followed Tao-jen through the form to classical music in the dawn of day much as I had been overwhelmed months before having just arrived and watching t'ai chi for the first time. There could be no denying that my experiences with this group of persons were a part of me and that living on the compound had had an impact on me. But the Settled Heart commune was not a social setting I would have chosen on the basis of personal considerations only; the therapeutic norm and an emphasis on negative expression, discerned early on, were features of the group's social life I did not find appealing or eager to participate in. This judgment influenced my behavior and I was generally uncomfortable while a member of the commune -- a discomfort most directly related to those times of the day when Tao-jen was present and the principal influence (i.e., meditation, breakfast and lunch). Interestingly enough, especially when away from the compound, I normally represented Settled Heart and Tao-jen in a positive way. Quite often I would mention something he had said or done (e.g., his characterization of the Tao as an "electromagnetic field"), which served as a reminder of his influence on me. However, I also qualified what I said by making it known that the lifestyle was not suitable for me even though I could appreciate aspects of Tao-jen, the commune and its residents.

The shifts in my feelings about Tao-jen and Settled Heart, the changes of perspective that occurred over the period of observation as detailed in the fieldnotes, show an obvious trend from general acceptance to open questioning and criticism. While I could almost always identify to some degree with the participants of the various episodes that were enacted during the course of my residency, I was rarely, if ever, "highly sympathetic" toward Tao-jen and Settled Heart and what they came to represent for me. Although there were dimensions of the life they lived I really liked (e.g., baking bread, silent times during meditation, casual socializing, and afternoons of solitude for reading, preparing fieldnotes or walking on the mountain), I never experienced a "seduction effect" or ever actually considered becoming one of them. But I must also observe that I experienced the loneliness of being "outside" and "marginal" (Lofland, 1971, pp. 96-99) because of my researcher's role, and my deliberate efforts to limit how personally involved I became in the dramas of Settled Heart were a recurrent theme of my residency.

> To what degree did you find it difficult or easy, privately, to be in a setting while observing and analyzing it at the same time? (Lofland, 1971, p. 131)

Within the first two weeks of my residency I discovered a peculiar difficulty in recalling and setting down interactions in which I was directly involved. Blank spots existed in a manner that was not the case for interactions I was able to observe without actually taking part in their enactments. It was as if a particular kind of amnesia occurred whenever I attempted to record the details of personal encounters, with Tao-jen especially. It seemed I could participate or I could observe, but I was unable to integrate the two. Gradually, this effect diminished and I became able to observe and participate consciously in the day-to-day

affairs of Settled Heart. I became more practiced at simultaneously embracing both modes of the technique. Nonetheless, I was consistently reminded throughout the fieldwork phase of this study of how difficult it is to have a clear perception of one's self, of how much easier it seems to be to make observations and interpretations of others with greater confidence.

Assuming the role of researcher and perceiving myself as an instrument of social inquiry led me to inhibit my behavior while living on the compound. This was particularly the case for the initial two or three months. I held myself back unnaturally during certain conversations and interactions in an effort to limit my input into the system I was attempting to describe and comprehend. I deliberately tried to limit the scope of my involvement thinking it would improve the quality of my observations. For instance, I did not investigate suspicious sounds in the kitchen at two or two-thirty one morning because I self-consciously considered it outside my role and decided it was inappropriate, as far as the study was concerned, to risk intruding myself so obtrusively. My hesitancy to "share" during morning meditation -- predawn meetings that were more group encounter than quiet contemplation -- was premised on the same precaution; that is, an uncertainty about feeding back my observations. It eventually became apparent to me, however, that "feeding back into the system" is inevitable; a clear distinction between observing and participating cannot be made. Again, watching and acting began to merge and my behavior became less stilted and more authentic without sacrificing the research perspective and without over-identifying with the participants of this social setting.

Participant observation made it impossible to avoid self-analysis. Settled Heart functioned as a context for monitoring my own internal processes and observing my own communicating. The difficulty of consciously over-riding personal biases and interacting freely with certain individuals in certain situations, the recognition of selective perception and projection, and a once-removed feeling throughout much of the fieldwork phase of this inquiry were common experiences. Given the theoretical orientation of the study on which this account is based, they are experiences that may have also possessed a self-fulfilling quality. At any rate, this essay, and particularly the present discussion, provides evidence for the personalized nature of qualitative inquiry. In a very real sense, as I have indicated before, it is as much a reflection of me and my experiences on the compound in the role of researcher as it is an "analytic description" (Lofland's [1971] term) of Tao-jen and the people who comprised the interpersonal network around him. In personal terms, the study itself serves as much to more fully discover and understand myself as to scrutinize and give commentary about others. In other words, an expanded sense of Tao-jen and greater insight into the community of persons associated with him in terms of their communicating and relationships is, in a most basic way, a deepening comprehension of myself. What is revealed through the narrative of this account is an unfolding of my own person. It should be obvious that we observe and interpret the behavior of others to bette know and understand ourselves. But, in fact, this important dimension of social/communication research is commonly unstated.[2]

On a number of occasions, consciously apprehending myself as the instrument of inquiry infused an unreal quality into the nature of this

research and my experiences as a resident. I became acutely aware that the observations and interpretations regularly recorded while a member of the commune represented only the very surface of what transpired. And there were moments when the research I was conducting seemed totally bizarre to me. Successive stages of deepening understanding of what it means to participate and observe in a given human communication context were interspersed with and complemented by periods of questioning, confusion, fragmentation and discouragement. Hard distinctions softened. Category systems dissolved. The interpersonal dynamics seemed so fluid at times, the variables so numerous, that a cogent approach to rendering them intelligible became virtually a pipedream. The perennial difficulty of putting static attributes on dynamic personalities was commonplace. Radical shifts occurred in my impressions of Tao-jen, the atmosphere of Settled Heart, and my subsequent comfort while living on the compound. The journey became essentially my own.

Analysis

> A system is but a squint at truth, and
> the more logically that system is developed,
> the more horrible that mental squint becomes.
>
> Lin Yutang

The research materials can be approached in a number of ways once the fieldwork is completed. Given the ahypothetical nature of the present study, analysis began with a careful reading of the fieldnotes (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, pp. 82-84). The intent was to identify behavioral patterns and interpretive themes (i.e., create a category system) which could then be used to construct an account of the commune's culture.

Creating a category system while reading the fieldnotes is an inherently cyclical process: a pattern presents itself; that is, a theme with interpretive promise emerges from the narrative and then is used to bring coherence to the text from whence it came. In other words, categories are created from the research materials and then subsequently applied to the research materials themselves as a means of explicating them -- the hermeneutical circle. Charles H. Kahn (1979), referring to his translation and commentary of Heraclitus, writes:

> The hermeneutical circle is constituted by the fact that it is only within the presuppositions of a meaningful framework that we can make sense of a given text; it is only by its applicability to the text in question that we can justify the choice of a particular framework. From this circle there is no escape. If we do not deliberately construct or select our own interpretive framework, we become unconscious and hence uncritical prisoners of whatever hermeneutical assumptions happen to be "in the air." (p.88)

According to Kahn, accepting this predicament means one must then attempt "to articulate the principles that govern the interpretation" of a given text. An important assumption of the study on which this essay is based stipulates the researcher as the instrument of inquiry, the locus of interpretation and sense-making. This is nothing other than what Kahn addresses in the passage just cited; that is, it is a way of acknowledging the vital importance of identifying and communicating the interpretive framework(s) used to construe the evidence of investigation. Quite literally, this study was an ongoing exercise in hermeneutics in that

everything relevant to its undertaking was cast and recast within the framework of a perspective that says the researcher is the instrument of inquiry (i.e., perpetual reflexivity).

A research undertaking like this one is unavoidably reflexive; Kahn (1979) would even say tautological. It occurs, I repeat, within the hermeneutical circle: each part can only be interpreted in relation to the whole, and the whole can only be understood with reference to the parts. Moreover, although the emphasis is on explaining or interpreting phenomena -- in this instance, social/communicative phenomena -- in its own terms, the procedure is still subject to restrictions. Any "squint at truth" is. For example, once an emerging category system is applied to a given phenomenon to interpret it, the process itself actually inhibits the recognition of other explanatory themes. Complete open-endedness and emergent explanation/interpretation that is fully comprehensive is not compatible with empirical circumstances. Scrutiny implies parameters. To look at something it is necessary to stop for a moment and take a particular view.

Furthermore, it is apparent that a category system reflects the facility and the limitation of language; that is, its liberating and imprisoning characteristics when regarded as a tool for processing and structuring experience. And it is more than just a means of communicating. As Julian Jaynes (1976) puts it:

> (C)oncrete metaphors increase enormously our powers of perception of the world about us and our understanding of it, and literally create new objects. Indeed, language is an organ of perception, not simply a means of communication. (p. 50)

A primary danger of any category system is its well-known tendency to fix or stagnate process. One can hedge against this tendency by modifying the system frequently enough so that it remains responsive and representative without washing out in excessive ambiguity; a guideline that was kept in mind throughout the analysis phase when interpretive themes were gleaned from and applied to the research materials of this study. My goal was to embed interpretive remarks within the narrative of this inquiry and to systematically discuss prominent themes relevant to the behavior and communicating of Settled Heart residents in order to accomplish a fluidity in the analysis of recorded observations and descriptions without sacrificing the coherence that is necessary to convey an overall sense of commune life. The episodes of confrontation narrated below and the interpretive remarks that accompany them demonstrate this approach.

Historical Sketch

Tao-jen (pronounced Dao-ren) came to the United States from China in 1947 to study comparative religion. He and his ex-wife Ayn (all names are pseudonyms), no longer a resident during the time of my fieldwork, co-founded the commune depicted in this essay. According to an informant, the commune went through a number of developmental phases and location changes before establishing itself in Colorado where this study took place. The early days, late 1960s, were in California during Tao-jen's involvement with the Esalen Institute at Big Sur. After a disbanding in California, there was a trek east and a period of time, summer 1971, when Tao-jen and those with him lived on a farm in Vermont. Following another disbanding, a journey west, and a few temporary residences, the commune

settled at the site of this study in late April 1972.

Financial Matters

Money was an ongoing aspect of commune life. When asked about a budget during a tape recorded interview, Kristaline, a prominent commune member, said:

> There's never been a definite budget set up. It's pretty much according to the needs of the Community and the fancies of the Community [said with a little laughter in her voice]. The majority of the money comes from the people who live here according to how much they can pay. So, if there's someone who's really into the trip and they want to live here, they don't have to pay. And they can owe it later or not.

Observation during my residency corroborated Kristaline's testimony. Persons perceived as serious about the "trip" were permitted to stay without paying. But this was occasionally a sensitive issue for some of the commune members who <u>were</u> paying room and board.

Physical Description

When approaching the compound, the main house was first seen from the road below: a white, two-story, wood frame building of moderate size, set on a mountain side overlooking a populated valley. The paved road from town turned to dirt and became quite steep before passing a small parking place for the compound; a few hundred feet farther it ended and a trail to the summit began. Just outside a small porch at one of the entrances to the main house, not far from the parking area, was a handmade sign on a post-like piece of driftwood. It read "Settled Heart" -- the commune's name.

Besides the main house, there were two smaller structures suitable as living quarters and another building referred to as the "art cabin."

There was also a swimming pool that had been enclosed with cement by a previous owner to make a fallout shelter; the utilities were partially installed. The "bomb shelter," as it was called, was a storage area cluttered with the discarded possessions of long-gone residents and the artifacts of abandoned projects. The commune's compound, then, consisted of five structures: four buildings, all painted white, and the concrete bomb shelter. In all, the physical site of the commune was an area of roughly 20 acres.

Prominent Commune Members

Ralph Freedman (1978) begins his biography of Hermann Hesse with these words:

> Disclosure is always intriguing, and literature is no exception. The masks artists have created for themselves have been persistently raised to allow the curious and the morbid a glimpse at the man underneath--his face at times anguished, at times quite bland. On the surface, this temptation to know more than meets the eye is easily explained. We all love gossip, and biography is gossip sublime. (p. 3)

Participant observation, as a method of social research, possesses a kind of generic relationship with gossip as well. People are inherently interesting, especially for the student of human behavior who, regardless of academic discipline or training, undertakes inquiry within the unbelievably rich realm of social/communication phenomena. But no matter how sophisticated the technique or abstract the journal article an element of "gossip" still remains and may account for that little tug on the researcher's conscience that prompts him or her to wonder, with McCall and Simmons (1969), "what motives, what alien causes, would lead a man to turn on his brethren with analytic eye?" (p. 28)

Residents of Settled Heart embodied a kaleidoscope of identities and personalities. They populated a unique communal scene. Those most prominent were: Tao-jen, easily the commune's most dominant and well-known resident whose influence was felt in the spiritual and interpersonal lives of everyone associated with Settled Heart; Kristaline, generally acknowledged as second-in-command to Tao-jen, who was the daughter of a Presbyterian theologian and a former prostitute; Edward, a young intellectual from England, who was expelled from the commune because he became hopelessly enmeshed in a relationship with Kristaline; Betty, who had been an architect and college professor, and was divorced from her husband and separated from her three sons; Carlton, the commune's only black resident, who referred to himself as "kind of an interesting orphan;" Mathew, who had been an engineering scientist in New Zealand for 21 years before relinquishing his job and his pension to become a member of Settled Heart; and Tom, who was "absent without leave" from the United States Army and liked to think of himself as a hermit.

I found it useful, while living on the compound, to approach what I experienced as drama. The prominent commune members sketched above were the main characters in a play. Settled Heart was a dynamic and unusual kind of theater.

Episodes of Confrontation

The person in the commune whose communicating was typically and consistently antagonistic was Tao-jen, the Chinese man who directed Settled Heart. More than any other resident, he accounted for most of the confrontational episodes that occurred during the period of observation. Consequently, the following discussion focuses on this aspect of Tao-jen's communication behavior.

I have already said that interpersonal confrontation was common. Settled Heart was a social context, a stage, where conflict often happened, where fighting was frequently encouraged and enacted. This generalization is supported by numerous specific incidents recorded in the fieldnotes. They range from softly spoken insults to full-fledged, face-to-face screaming matches replete with obscenities. Sometimes the conflict occurred between Tao-jen and one other person; sometimes others were involved in the fighting. And on one occasion, Tao-jen struck a female member of the commune.

Conflict as a convention of relating was remarkable and completely unexpected. The many incidents of confrontation that took place, with Tao-jen as the principal participant and initiator, were striking and contrary to my idea of what it might be like to live with a Taoist sage in a Taoist community. The prevalence of interpersonal strife was a surprising discovery.

The following accounts depict incidents of confrontation that occurred on the Settled Heart compound. I have selected two episodes that, on the basis of my experience as a member of the commune, strike me as representative of the more than 68 incidents of conflict I recorded. They are presented here so the reader may acquire a sense of what it was like to live in the Settled Heart commune and be able to assess the interpretive remarks that are based on the given descriptions.

Episode 1

On 21 January 1978, Harold, a member of the commune, brought a friend to the compound for meditation and breakfast. After more than three months of observation, Tao-jen's behavior with newcomers and visitors was

familiar and, under certain conditions like the episode now being described, confrontation became almost inevitable. His pattern was simple enough. He merely asked questions and gathered information until an issue was revealed that he could use confrontationally. He liked to find out family background. He encouraged one to speak about personal convictions and beliefs and, in the case of Harold's friend, it was this area that incited the conflict.

During the process of Tao-jen's interrogating it became known that Harold's friend was involved with religiously sponsored work in Bolivia. His use of the word "divine" incensed Tao-jen; his mention of "God" angered him as well. Tao-jen told this person that his religious gibberish (not his wording) was "bullshit" that stood between him and "reality." He accused him of being a "do-gooder" who was "fucking up" people in Bolivia the way he had witnessed missionaries "fuck up" people in China. Yelling, he indicted this man as the worst kind of "ugly American" imaginable and he said that his idea of "serving mankind" was "fucked." Tao-jen labeled him psychotic. He called him the most "sick" American he had ever encountered. And he recommended that Harold's friend come to Settled Heart and get well.

Tao-jen's behavior was almost standardized. His customary behavior during scenes such as this one was to circle the kitchen stoves in a pacing-like fashion, pausing now and then to take food or sip tea. His gesturing was minimal even when his yelling or screaming was its most intense. And his gaze was normally averted. Rarely did he look directly at Harold's friend. His profanity and abusive remarks were generous, especially favored phrases like "goddam, son-of-a-bitch" and "scum of the earth."

Tao-jen's ranting at Harold's friend was interspersed with quiet conversation. During these interludes Harold's friend spoke softly and evenly but the effort of doing so became apparent as Tao-jen's abusiveness increased. For instance, during the course of one of these abatings, he told Tao-jen how he had been taught that in an argument both people are "wrong." He appreciated, he said with a slight tremor in his voice, Tao-jen's right to believe as he did and to express these beliefs, but personally he did not agree with him. Tao-jen responded by suggesting to Harold's friend that he would long remember their conversation. Harold's friend disagreed. He doubted that this would be the case. A few moments later he informed Tao-jen that he did not "respect" him. Tao-jen became enraged. He ordered Harold's friend to leave. "Get outta here! Go out the door right now!" he screamed. Harold's friend exited while Tao-jen continued to order him out and shout his customary abuses. Harold accompanied his friend. When they were gone, Tao-jen said to those of us in the kitchen that if Harold's friend had no respect for him, then he would respond in kind. Tao-jen also said, as he typically did after one of his outbursts, that he communicated in this way to enliven the day-to-day affairs of commune life.

It is important to note that veteran residents of the commune, like Kristaline, Mathew, Betty and Tom, took Tao-jen's explosions in stride. They occurred as a matter of course and, just as he said, charged Settled Heart's social atmosphere but in a way that was occasionally little more than entertainment for the seasoned on-looker. Sometimes, when Tao-jen launched into one of his streams of profanity, the phrases were so practiced and well-known that they became humorous for the experienced membership despite his apparent seriousness at the time. And there was no

recorded instance, during the period of study, when Tao-jen acknowledged or appreciated this comic side of his tirades.

Persons new to the commune and Tao-jen's ways usually responded quite differently, however. Looking around the kitchen after Harold and his friend had departed, it was Albert and Markoff, recently arrived from Germany, who appeared most affected by Tao-jen's outburst. Albert opened his eyes wide and rolled them while he rinsed his eating utensils at the sink. Markoff gave the impression of being disturbed by what he had witnessed. He sat quietly, withdrawn, and seemingly reluctant to lift his eyes from their focus on the floor.

Episode 2

The incident above illustrates what may be called a simple case of confrontation; it involved, in essence, Tao-jen and Harold's friend. The rest of us were spectators. While these two men enacted their drama, we watched from the edges of the kitchen--theater-in-the-round.

However, as I have already mentioned, confrontation on the Settled Heart compound was not confined to the simple case. On a number of occasions, the conflict that occurred took place between Tao-jen and at least two other persons. In these instances, then, the cast was larger and, once again, there was an audience.

Confrontation of this kind was characteristically longer-lived than the simple case. Quite often it unfolded through a considerable period of time which allowed others, willingly or not, to become included in the controversy. A dispute occurred and then, typically, it went underground only to emerge again and be continued. Each time this happened the likelihood that the controversy's social network would expand naturally

increased. The process was self-perpetuating. More unfinished business could accrue when the number of persons involved got larger. Also, the underground phase tended to be an incubation time--a time for reconsidering the issues, analyzing past transactions and preparing future arguments. This was especially true, it seemed, for Tao-jen. His long afternoon walks were ideal for this sort of rumination. The verbalizing of morning meditation was complemented by contemplative hours on the mountain. Each nurtured and reinforced the other. It was a vital alliance in Tao-jen's Settled Heart routine and it was evident every time he picked up an episode from a previous meditation period, not necessarily confrontational, and elaborated it with reflections that had occurred to him while walking the trails.

The incident below illustrates these manifest and tacit phases of confrontation in a single meditation period. More importantly, it shows a conflict situation comprised of more than two people. Tao-jen is the pivotal person in a one-against-two configuration.

There was virtually no quiet, no time without talking, during a morning meditation period late in January. Tao-jen instructed those of us present to seat ourselves in a horseshoe with its open end toward the plate glass windows facing east. Although he did so infrequently, Tao-jen had various reasons for arranging us in particular ways. He might put us in a circle with our knees almost touching because he wanted us to feel the "electromagnetic field" of Taoism, because he wanted us to experience the "energy" circulating. On other occasions, he wished to see everyone and so he situated us accordingly; this appeared to be his purpose for sitting us in a horseshoe configuration on this particular morning. As soon as we were settled, Tao-jen began to speak as though he had thought

about and planned what he was going to say. The primary interaction was an intense confrontation with Kristaline into which Betty inserted herself at various times and in different ways.

Tao-jen began by telling us that he expected "100 percent" for Settled Heart from everyone living on the compound. Tao-jen's expectation was a demand for commitment and it was especially crucial with regard to Kristaline. Directing his attention to her, Tao-jen informed Kristaline that presently she was only "50/50." He told her she was "spacing out, goofing off and fading away" and he attacked her sexual behavior, calling it "wrong." In Tao-jen's opinion, Kristaline's current involvement with Todd was "dangerous." There was a 70 percent chance, he said, she would be "fucking" another man within a month and that when this occurred Todd would get a gun and shoot someone. He predicted there would be either a homocide or a suicide.

Kristaline denied this. She said Todd was the most gentle man she had been with, but that Tao-jen was unable to see this side of him. Tao-jen reminded Kristaline that she and Tom had been together on the farm but when they returned to the compound she "kicked him out." Again, Kristaline denied what Tao-jen said. "I did not," she countered with more assertiveness coming into her voice and, at this point, Betty put herself into the dialogue by emphasizing that Kristaline had not rejected Tom. Kristaline explained to Tao-jen that when Tom came to her tent to stay the night while they were camping together on the farm, he knew she was spending time with Todd. And she affirmed again that she had not kicked him out. These opening remarks about Kristaline's commitment and criticism of her sexual conduct evolved into a wider-ranging conflict when Betty intervened on Kristaline's behalf: Tao-jen intensified his attack

on Kristaline, and Betty took her side. Eventually, she was successful in redirecting Tao-jen's attention to her. He accused Betty of defending the "underdog" and he told her she was "oozing" in her enactment of this protective role with Kristaline.

Betty, in what appeared to be an effort to be included, asked Tao-jen if he was angry at her because of her sexual behavior. She referred to her relationship with Carlton which can be seen, superficially, as an older white woman involved with a young black man. She suggested that Tao-jen was displeased with her too, not just Kristaline. Tao-jen replied that this was not the case. He said Betty was more mature and knew what she was doing. This was not the situation, however, as far as Kristaline was concerned. Were Kristaline a daughter in his family, he said, her behavior would not be tolerated. He compared her unfavorably with a niece in Peking (Beijing) whom he presented as an ideal by stressing how busy and productive she was (e.g., standing in line all night to get a library card and then going to work the following morning). Tao-jen re-emphasized that Betty's relationship with Carlton was of no real significance to him. He did observe, however, that Carlton was not genuinely involved with the commune and he said he disliked his verbal "sniping" from the perimeter. Shifting his remarks to Kristaline, Tao-jen told her that given the questionableness of her current conduct he was no longer certain he would be able to trust her as the person in charge of construction on the farm. He reminded her of her poor choice of siding material for the main house. Betty interjected that Tao-jen was afraid Kristaline would leave him like all the other women he had been with.

Betty continued to intervene for Kristaline. The situation intensified. Suddenly, she jumped to her feet and then defiantly

positioned herself directly in front of Tao-jen with only two feet of distance between them. She tried to persuade him to come down from his cushion in the corner, even reaching out to him once, but Tao-jen refused and pulled himself away from her. He told her he did not like her Esalen-direct-encounter-approach, and he asked her not to hit him. He said he did not want to be hit on the head the way his former wife used to do. In a humorous, deliberately comical fashion that had a disarming effect, Tao-jen moved his arms alternately up and down in front of his face and upper body in a kung fu, martial arts manner and he elicited a few chuckles from the audience.

Before Betty positioned herself immediately in front of him, Tao-jen steadily increased the volume of his voice until he was shouting at her as their disagreement crescendoed into confrontation. With her near at hand, however, he lowered his voice and turned his face and upper body slightly away from her. But even though he was no longer shouting, Tao-jen continued to resist Betty completely. And the more Tao-jen resisted, the more he refused to meet her on her terms instead of his (i.e., by leaving his place of privilege on his special cushion and sitting with her in a common area of the meditation room), the more frustrated Betty became. Soon, she was pounding her open hand on the floor again and again, pleading "You don't listen! You don't listen!" Finally, in what seemed to be exasperation, she flew to her feet and ran from the room with bouncing strides, up on her toes and crying. A few minutes later, Betty returned from the kitchen with a freshly brewed pot of tea.

It is difficult to ignore how strongly Betty's apparent desire to be included influenced her behavior. Tao-jen's concern, in this instance, was clearly with Kristaline. It was her commitment, her allegiance to the

commune and her devotion to him--which was less than he wanted--that troubled him. There was a vulnerability present in his criticism of Kristaline, a dependence upon her as the "daughter of the family" (my quotation marks) that may have threatened his self-assumed patriarchal role in the commune. His regard for Kristaline may be surmised from the noticeable lack of profanity in his outbursts toward her; evidence that the daughter image, although only one aspect of their relationship, is a viable one. Betty was of secondary importance for Tao-jen when he lashed out at Kristaline.

Following a short period of quiet, no more than five minutes, Tao-jen instructed Betty, Mathew, Tom and Kristaline to join him in a small circle at the front of the meditation room. Then, he encouraged Kristaline to speak by saying that he felt their earlier encounter, prior to Betty's intervention when we were all sitting in a horseshoe, was unfinished for her. Forming the small group and returning the focus of his attention to Kristaline suggested it was unfinished for Tao-jen as well.

Kristaline responded to Tao-jen's encouragement. She told him that when he behaved toward her the way he did during the opening portion of this meditation period, her tendency was to not talk at all. She then patiently itemized the following: (a) Kristaline felt that Tao-jen was "laying" or forcing the Chinese culture on her. In her opinion, one culture is not necessarily better than another. She reminded Tao-jen of how he was always comparing her to his niece in Peking and she implied that she did not like it. Tao-jen listened quietly. (b) Kristaline informed Tao-jen he was manipulative. Tao-jen replied that he did have manipulative skills. After all, he said, he had been a Secretary to the Prime Minister of China and, consequently, in a position of power over 800

million people. But, he quickly added, he was mostly in charge of entertaining American officials and military personnel because he could speak English. (c) Kristaline observed that Tao-jen acted as if he were insecure; he was always jumping to defend himself. Tao-jen said there was truth in her observation. He <u>was</u> insecure living away from his home in a foreign country with "barbarians." (d) Finally, Kristaline revealed that she had been most hurt by his comment that he was not sure if he could trust her with the construction and business matters pertaining to the farm. She said she had a "good mind" and that she can attend to these affairs, although she also admitted that she does become fatigued and restless with concerns of this kind and occasionally "spaces out." Tao-jen did not respond, but his attentiveness indicated his acknowledgment. At the close of this meditation session he was much subdued and appeared genuinely receptive to Kristaline's observations of him and her verbalized responses and reactions with regard to his behavior toward her.

Interpretive Remarks

There are, of course, many ways to interpret the conflict that took place in the commune. The study of human communication is one way of attempting to make human experience intelligible. Obviously, one goal of this kind of inquiry is to better discern the people who constitute particular social settings. The episodes of confrontation narrated above are just two of the many that occurred, and they demonstrate that Tao-jen was a prevailing influence in the commune. Consequently, it is useful to leave our brief survey of specific instances and address the issue more generally by asking: In what ways can we understand Tao-jen's

assertive, confronting behavior? How is it that he often communicated in this manner?

There are two immediately obvious perspectives for structuring an understanding of Tao-jen's explosiveness: explanations/interpretations deriving from existing theory (i.e., extrinsic) and explanations/interpretations emerging from the social setting itself (i.e., intrinsic). An extrinsic approach is more static. The fundamental task is to identify similarities between events occurring in the field and issues discussed in the literature. An intrinsic approach is more dynamic. The fundamental task is a narrational unfolding of the social setting's content so that the description or account becomes its own explanation.

The following discussion uses the idea of organizational culture as developed by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982, 1983) to suggestively illustrate an extrinsic approach for interpreting Tao-jen's aggressive communicating. An indigenous or intrinsic reading of the conflict that occurred in the commune (see Spradley & McCurdy (1972) for a discussion of the so-called New Ethnography or ethnographic semantics) is illustrated by reporting and acknowledging the legitimacy of the specific explanations that Tao-jen himself provided for his confrontational style of communicating.

Extrinsic

Organizational Culture

A researcher using the organizational culture approach of Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982, 1983) begins with the assumption that organizational sense-making is accomplished and displayed communicatively (1982, p. 123) and then attempts to respond to two questions: "(1) What

are the key communication activities, the unfolding of which are occasions when sense-making is accomplished? and (2) What is the sense members of any particular organization have made of their experiences?" (p. 124). Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) discuss several "indicators and displayers of organizational sense-making" that can be focused on in the process of uncovering an organization's culture (p. 124). Relevant constructs (objects, individuals, processes), facts ("social knowledge"), practices (organizational activities for "getting the job done"), vocabulary (vernacular or argot), metaphors, stories (which "recapitulate experience verbally") and rites and rituals are all facets of an organization that reveal its culture (pp. 124-126). By interpreting these features of an organization's life a researcher may begin an unfolding of its culture. These authors also mention the reflexivity of interpretive research and confirm my feeling while in the field that I was revealing a great deal about myself through the very nature of my investigations while ostensibly making commentary about others.

Some of the indicators and displayers of organizational sense-making just enumerated (i.e., metaphors, stories, rites and rituals) bring us to the idea of "performance" in organizational life. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) consider two connotations of this term. The first, following Goffman, suggests "theatricality" and "play-acting." The second, inspired by Turner and Burke, possesses the sense of "bringing to completion" or "accomplishing" (p. 129). Synthesizing the two, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) "conceive of performances as those situationally relative and variable interactions by which organizational members construct organizational reality" (p. 131). The perspective of these authors is contextually oriented and it stipulates the constituting function of communicating actions within an organization.

The relevance of the two Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982, 1983) essays excerpted here is established by making the evident observation that the Settled Heart commune, as I experienced it during my stay as a resident researcher, may be apprehended and made sense of as an organization. If, as these authors assert, "an organization is the interlocked actions of a collectivity" (1982, p. 122), then the aggregate of people comprising Settled Heart during my tenure as a participant observer unquestionably qualifies. Consequently, the organizational culture approach of Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982, 1983) briefly discussed above is a conceptual framework that may be applied to Tao-jen's abrasive communicating and the context in which it occurred for the purpose of exploring and expressing in an interpretive manner the social/organizational realities of the Settled Heart commune. What follows is a sample of the kind of interpretation that can be undertaken using an organizational culture perspective. The theme to be considered, and suggested earlier in this essay, is the performance aspect of Tao-jen's communicating.

Performance. Living at Settled Heart, and with Tao-jen especially, was a dramatic experience. The performance dimension of Tao-jen's outbursts was, for me, an inescapable impression every time I witnessed one of his tirades. When Tao-jen confronted someone the interaction that unfolded possessed the conventional characteristics of being staged--actors, setting, audience, dialogue, drama. Tao-jen created within the Settled Heart commune a unique kind of theater that was also a particular kind of psychodrama because of the psychological undertones that were usually present. To watch this drama was to be a part of it, and in a very real way Tao-jen constituted himself and his identity within the

commune through the enactment of his confrontations. Furthermore, because Tao-jen was undeniably the most powerful and influential person in the Settled Heart social structure, the nature of his communicating both forged and tempered the interpersonal relationships of commune members.

One way of illustrating the theatricality of commune life is to consider Tao-jen's use of private/public conversation. Private/public conversation is a kind of interaction that consists of talk, frequently critical or sensitive in nature, with one other person in the presence of many; talk that is staged and intended to be overheard by the others present while, at the same time, possessing an exclusiveness that discourages joining in. I observed three basic types of this interactive style while living as a resident researcher on the Settled Heart compound: (a) private/public conversation that was monologue; (b) private/public conversation that was dialogue but noncombative; and (c) private/public conversation that was dialogue and confrontational.

The first type of private/public conversation typically occurred when Tao-jen addressed one particular person, without any apparent expectation of reply, as a way of verbalizing his thoughts and speaking to us all. Under these circumstances the person Tao-jen addressed was merely someone to speak to, not with. It was a way for him to structure his remarks and physically focus what he was saying. The second person's role during interactions of this kind was to listen without verbally engaging Tao-jen.

The second type of private/public conversation took place when Tao-jen and the person he addressed participated in conversation while other members of the commune paid attention to what they said. The most common form of this kind of talk was gossip. In this way Tao-jen was able

to express his feelings and thoughts, usually criticisms, about someone who was absent from the present situation and make them known throughout the commune. Under these circumstances the person Tao-jen addressed sometimes encouraged him to speak in this manner. This person might also contribute gossip to the conversation and, occasionally, actually initiate private/public conversation of this kind.

The third type of private/public conversation is the one most germane to this discussion. These were the times when Tao-jen gave "shit" to someone who was on stage with him. Obviously, this kind of interaction possessed the greatest potential for confrontation. Private/public conversation of this form typically took place during morning meditation or during the course of a collectively prepared breakfast--rituals that ordered commune life and assured that a proportionately large number of the membership would be present as spectators of what occurred. Meditation and breakfast were the show times when Tao-jen gave his best performances to his largest audiences. Even people in the commune spoke in these terms. For instance, it was not uncommon for a resident of Settled Heart who had missed meditation to be told by another member of the commune that he or she had missed a "great show."

When Tao-jen confronted someone, Harold's friend for example, what ensued can be discussed and made intelligible in terms of the characteristics of communicative performances identified by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983). According to these authors, communicative performances are interactional, contextual, episodic and improvisational. All of these characteristics pertain to the numerous instances when Tao-jen initiated conflict and discord into commune life.

Interactional. The participatory and interdependent dimensions of Tao-jen's confrontational communicating are obvious. Even those instances when Tao-jen lost his focus and ranted in a general way to no one in particular required an audience to help create, sustain and terminate his communicative performances. The people who participated in Settled Heart's social life constituted the interactional atmosphere within which Tao-jen assumed his prominent role. And the manner in which Tao-jen enacted his patriarchal, assertive presence influenced the commune's communicating and social life. Together, Tao-jen, and the individuals living with him on the Settled Heart compound, played their parts by adopting the relevant organizational roles and jointly brought into being the commune's organizational realities (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 132).

Contextual. Morning meditation, t'ai chi ch'uan, breakfast and, to some extent, lunch were tribal gatherings. All of these events took place in the main house. Each had its place: meditation in the meditation room; t'ai chi on a large, enclosed porch; and breakfast and lunch in the kitchen. The main house was the commune's acknowledged social center in that certain activities that constituted Settled Heart's identity as a Taoist commune (e.g., meditation and t'ai chi) were enacted in that setting. Casual socializing was more likely to occur at other locations on the compound.

It has been demonstrated that confrontation was a prevalent feature of Tao-jen's communicating. Consequently, his presence at meditation, breakfast and lunch made these contexts the best candidates for conflict--a point illustrated by the accounts given in this essay. Virtually all the drama that evolved from Tao-jen's outbursts occurred in one of these settings. T'ai chi, however, was generally quiet. Although Tao-jen

offered instructional comments and sometimes lectured or conversed while we were going through the form or sequence of positions, conflict during t'ai chi was rare. The slow, fluid movements were incompatible with aggression.

Time, as context, is a larger container; it is more abstract and encompassing than place. At Settled Heart the rituals that ordered commune life were time-bound. The morning was the most structured and routine part of a resident's day. And it was also the time when Tao-jen was his most visible and accessible to the membership as a whole. After lunch he walked on the mountain. What evolved from this, because Tao-jen's communicating was so frequently confrontational, was a community held understanding of when it was appropriate to fight. In the morning conflict was legitimate and encouraged but after noon the unspoken dictum was "be nice" to one another. It can be said, then, on the basis of these remarks and the accounts of this essay, that the communicative performances of Tao-jen and other participants were, as Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) ascribe, situationally and temporally embedded in the organizational reality of Settled Heart (p. 133).

Episodic. Settled Heart residents recognized the importance of morning meditation. Participants gathered before dawn every day for three or four hours of what was typically intense social interaction. Tao-jen attributed a great deal of significance to these early morning meetings. Anyone who did not attend meditation regularly was, in his view, not really a committed member of the commune.

The regularity and intensity of morning meditation gave these encounters a strong episodic quality. Even though other morning activities such as breakfast and t'ai chi were distinctive events and can

be treated as separate units of analysis, this is particularly the case for morning meditation. In fact, these predawn gatherings may have been the single most important and influential occurrence in commune life. To be truly aware of what was happening on the compound it was necessary to be present at meditation and everyone at Settled Heart acknowledged this.

Confrontation during meditation was frequent and the conflict that occurred was often punctuated in this way; that is, disputes of an ongoing nature were given their principal enactment during meditation with a minimal amount of spill-over into other commune activities. In other words, meditation, to a recognizable extent, compartmentalized resident behavior. This, coupled with the intensity of confrontation that commonly took place, infused these early morning dramas with the episodic quality of scenes in a play.

During one of the several mini-lectures Tao-jen gave throughout the course of the observation period, he discussed the idea of "reality" as a "discrete" phenomenon. The idea that reality is discrete, it can be argued, is just another way of saying that his experience of commune life was episodic. Furthermore, if Tao-jen entertained this idea seriously and allowed it to have a bearing on his behavior, then it is also a way of interpreting and comprehending his explosiveness. Interacting with others as if reality were discrete (i.e., episodes bracketed in some idiosyncratic manner and separate from one another) removes the continuity of one's behavior, it disrupts the consensually shared time-line of mutual transactions. The result is a here-and-now focus that eliminates the antecedents and consequences of communicating. A mind-set that is not concerned with what has gone before or with what will follow facilitates erratic and unsocialized behavior. This perspective gives communicating a

unilateral quality. It places the emphasis on self-interested demands with only a remote connection to a more encompassing perspective; it is self-expression within a limited context. Essentially, it allows one to forego transitions and to behave discontinuously. The abruptness with which Tao-jen's outbursts often emerged, his sudden changes of temperament, conform with this idea; that is, the experience of "reality" as individual episodes. The idea that reality consists of discrete occurrences in conjunction with the physical, temporal and interactional explicitness of morning meditation appears to have contributed to the manner in which Tao-jen punctuated the stream of his organizational experience (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 133).

Improvisational. When Tao-jen confronted Harold's friend there was much about his performance that was expected. By this time, almost four months into the observation period, confrontation had been established as a prominent feature of Tao-jen's communicating. His behavior, as noted in the account of this incident, evidenced a general pattern that characterized his confrontations: Tao-jen's interrogating provided him with the information he needed to initiate conflict; solicited information that was personal and sensitive worked best for this purpose; minimal gesturing, averted eyes, yelling, screaming and favored abusive phrases were all identifiable characteristics that usually were present whenever Tao-jen engaged in intense confrontation. Consequently, experienced residents of the commune could generally anticipate when a conflict was in the making as well as follow the sequence of its unfolding with considerable familiarity.

But confrontation was not inevitable whenever Tao-jen interacted with someone, even when he solicited sensitive information. And when it did

occur, the way it was acted out could be surprising. Tao-jen's outbursts, despite their frequency, continued to possess an adequate degree of unpredictability and retain their entertainment value. Every adversary was a potential challenge to his virtuosity, a chance to demonstrate improvisation in his confrontational style of communicating.

For example, I was surprised when Tao-jen ordered Harold's friend to leave the compound. Typically, the confrontations he engaged in developed by proceeding through their most intense periods toward quieter resolutions--however long-lived or short-lived they may have been. But in this case, Tao-jen ended the conflict at its climax. He did not exhaust the yang to return to the yin. The characteristic pattern was varied. As Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) observe, organizational performers rarely "memorize" their lines (p. 134). It can also be said that organizational performers do not typically rehearse their behavior (although each performance is a kind of rehearsal). Even though Tao-jen's confrontational style consisted of verbal and behavioral characteristics that were recognizable across conflict situations, every episode was unique and could never be fully anticipated.

Intrinsic

During the course of my stay as a resident researcher, Tao-jen used seven explicit reasons to support his encouragement of negative expression, aggression and confrontation within the membership of Settled Heart. Each of these reasons may be taken as an intrinsic explanation of Tao-jen's explosiveness. Enumerated, they are: (a) the heightened sense of well-being afterwards that he repeatedly made known with his standard exclamation "I feel better!"; (b) the inappropriateness and

inauthenticity of being positive all the time based on his experiences with Quakers during an earlier period of his life in the United States; (c) the idea of "fighting to get closer" which Tao-jen paralleled with Mao Tse-tung's "struggle meetings;" (d) the psychological inevitability that unexpressed anger and negativity become displaced and manifest themselves in indirect, interpersonally unclean ways; (e) the importance of exhausting the yang to return to the yin, going fully through one's aggressive tendencies for the purpose of overcoming the "blocks" they create and thus becoming more alive; (f) the unnaturalness of suppressing anger premised on the belief that as long as one is alive there is anger; and (g) the health bestowing effect of exposing one's worst side. These seven reasons, merely listed here and taken out of context, represent a number of factors that converge to make sense of the episodes of confrontation described in this essay. It is information spoken by Tao-jen himself that may be used as a starting point for further consideration and elaboration in the effort to interpret and understand his confrontational communicating.

For example, closely related to the importance Tao-jen gave to exhausting the yang to return to the yin was his belief that one must indulge and exaggerate the ego as a means of transcending it. Just as his tirades, he said, were premised on an effort to deplete the yang, so were his grandiose statements about himself based on an effort to give full expression to ego behavior as a method of achieving humility. What is important from a communication perspective is the impression that, for Tao-jen, exhausting the yang and exaggerating the ego were essentially synonymous processes and for both he relied on his abusiveness as a communicator. His confrontational, self-involved manner--"Fuck

everybody!"--connected directly with depleting the yang, and his self-aggrandizement--"I am the world's greatest therapist!"--connected directly, he would have us believe, with an attempt to overcome his ego.

What brings coherence to the seven specific reasons Tao-jen used to justify his aggressive communicating is their self-given nature; they exist as an explanation of his outbursts that he himself provided. Tao-jen's seven-part rationale for his abusiveness illustrates the usefulness of indigenous evidence for interpreting human communicative behavior.

Concluding Comments

Settled Heart was conceptualized in many different ways by the people who came to the compound. The function it served, the potential it promised, varied from person to person. For some it was a haven, a place to be safe for a while. For others it was little more than a curiosity, or the location where Tao-jen lived, or an interlude in a longer journey. Motives were mixed; one person might arrive for a number of reasons. And there were a few who came to the compound seeking something greater than themselves. They had a communitarian vision. They wished to join with others and create a style of living not possible as single and isolated individuals.

The number and variety of people who arrived and departed constantly reminded me that Settled Heart was embedded in a larger social context. In a commune as loosely structured as Settled Heart and virtually accessible to everyone,[3] outside influences (i.e., the conventions of the larger society) were inevitable. Consequently, while the norming affect of commune living was considerable, it tended to intensify certain aspects

of human relationship (e.g., the confrontational encounters of morning meditation) rather than offer any truly unique alternatives. Carlton, when asked to sum up his impressions of Settled Heart, expressed it this way:

> [A]ll the people do there is play the same games that are played out there in the regular run-of-the-mill society. But it's more real or it's more intense because you have a smaller group of people and the level, the mind level of the people that come here seems to be a little bit higher and they seem to be more aware, they can play these games more effectively than the...general, the mass of society, you know, that's out there. I mean you can, you can see these games out there and just go slip-slip-slide in and out of them and around them, you know. And you got all these people playing them and it's just, it's the same life as out there it's just highly intensified. It's- it's like like a quickening process, or a quickening in the process, so to speak. So you can't help but learn, you know. And ahh but, what you're learning is the same thing you would learn out there only you're learning a little quicker which is going to give you some space near the end to learn something else. That's about it. The people here are no different. They're just either more fucked up or...more together.

The simple observation that Settled Heart was a part of a larger social scene is what gives the ethnographies of particular speech communities their general relevance. Clifford Geertz (1973) wrote that "[s]ociety's forms are culture's substance" (p. 28). My tenure as a resident researcher in the Settled Heart commune gave me the opportunity to experience a particular and unique facet of American culture, and to document this experience from a communication perspective. I was surprised by the high incidence of confrontation initiated by Tao-jen, and the influence this had on the daily round of commune life. This unexpected discovery, which I have given an account of in this essay, was radically different from my expectations about what it might be like to live with a Taoist sage in a Taoist community.

But it is also necessary to realize that Tao-jen and the Settled Heart commune may have exceeded what I was able to discern because of my expectations. Unlike other so-called spiritual communities, Settled Heart was not as subject to the loss of credibility that might occur because something scandalous is revealed or discovered by outsiders (Butler, 1983; Rodarmor, 1983). In a very real sense, Tao-jen and Settled Heart were already scandalous. The outrageous quality of Tao-jen's interactions and behavior in the commune created a unique reputation. Although Tao-jen and other members of the commune may be faulted because their behavior appeared to deviate from the quietist principles of Taoist philosophy expressed in the Tao Te Ching (Tao-jen & Ayn, 1972) and the Inner Chapters of the Chuang Tsu (Tao-jen & Ayn, 1974), they can not be accused of attempting to be "holier than thou." The episodes of confrontation that regularly took place made certain of this and constituted a significant feature of commune life. In fact, it is possible to see this characteristic of Tao-jen and the Settled Heart culture he was instrumental in creating as an alternative and refreshing way to think about spiritual living.[4]

More importantly, "fighting to get closer" worked. I am convinced, on the basis of extended conversations with commune members, that Tao-jen's confrontational tactics were significant occurrences for the small, central membership of Settled Heart. In simple terms, they were bonding episodes for the individuals who experienced a "break through" with regard to their own personal growth as a result of "taking shit" from Tao-jen; these experiences made it possible for them to feel a unique affection for the man. Furthermore, residents who had undergone this experience of personal insight as a result of Tao-jen's abusiveness felt a

special comradery among themselves. Consequently, for this small, select group of commune members, and contrary to the experience of many others who encountered Tao-jen and Settled Heart (Communication Quarterly, in press), a strong social network and community identity were created and sustained through the enactment of confrontational/bonding encounters with Tao-jen.

NOTES

[1]This essay is based, in part, on my dissertation which was directed by John R. Stewart. I would like to thank Dr. Stewart for his constructive comments on earlier drafts of this essay. A shorter version of this account was presented at the Eastern Communication Association Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 1986.

[2]See the final paragraph of Charles Taylor's essay in Dallmayr & McCarthy (1977). Also the final pages of Joseph Campbell (1949).

[3]Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1972) discusses what she calls the "boundary problems of today's communes" and the implications of easy penetration on group cohesiveness and identity. "In America as a whole," she writes, "strangers do not knock at the doors of residences asking for a place to sleep or inquiring whether they can become a member of that particular family, but they do approach communes with these requests. To some extent, communes are considered fair game for anyone, and their borders are easily penetrable" (p. 173).

[4]Harsh treatment as a way of helping others experience "enlightenment" is certainly nothing new, however. See Cleary & Cleary (1977).

REFERENCES

Bogdan, R. (1972). Participant observation in organizational settings. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.

Bogdan, R. & Taylor, S.J. (1975). Introduction to qualitative research methods: A phenomenological approach to the social sciences. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Bruyn, S.T. (1966). The human perspective in sociology: The methodology of participant observation. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Butler, K. (1983). Events are the teacher. Coevolution Quarterly, no. 40, 112-123.

Capra, F. (1982). The turning point: Science, society and the rising culture. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Cleary, T., & Cleary, J.C. (1977). (Trans.). The blue cliff record. In the Chinese Pi Yen Lu (3 vols.) (Forward by T.M. Roshi). Boulder, CO and London: Shambhala.

Filstead, W.J. (1970). Qualitative methodology: Firsthand involvement with the social world. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co.

Freedman, R. (1978). Hermann Hesse: Pilgrim of crisis. New York: Pantheon Books.

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Jacobs, G. (1970). (Ed.). The participant observer. New York: George Braziller.

Kanter, R.M. (1972). Commitment and community. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Lofland, J. (1971). Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis. Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc.

McCall, G.J. & Simmons, J.L. (1969). (Eds.). Issues in participant observation: A text and reader. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Pacanowsky, M.E., & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1982). Communication and organizational cultures. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 46, 115-130.

Pacanowsky, M.E., & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1983). Organizational communication as cultural performance. Communication Monographs, 50, 126-147.

Pearce, W.B. (1977). Naturalistic study of communication: Its function and form. Communication Quarterly, 25, 51-56.

Philipsen, G. (1977). Linearity of research design in ethnographic studies of speaking. Communication Quarterly, 25, 42-50.

Rodarmor, W. (1983). The secret life of Swami Muktananda. Coevolution Quarterly, no. 40, 104-111.

Spradley, J.P., & McCurdy, D.W. (1972). The cultural experience: Ethnography in complex society. Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc.

Stewart, J.R., & Philipsen, G. (1984). Communication as situated accomplishment: The cases of hermeneutics and ethnography. In B. Dervin & M.J. Voigt (Eds.), Progress in communication sciences. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Tao-jen & Ayn (pseudonyms). (1972). Tao Tsu/Tao te ching. New York: Vintage.

Tao-jen & Ayn (pseudonyms). (1974). Chuang Tsu/Inner chapters. New York: Vintage.